

**Remarks at a Tribute to Governor  
James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina**  
*October 24, 2000*

Thank you very much. Well, first of all, to all our friends from North Carolina, welcome to Washington. I'm glad you're here. The two previous speakers have been two of the closest friends I've had in politics and two of the best Governors with whom I've ever served. And so I thank them both.

I want to start by saying a word about Governor Patton and then get into the tribute to Governor Hunt and what all that means for what we're doing as Americans right now in this election season.

First of all, Paul Patton ran for Governor and won in Kentucky after Jim Hunt and I had been out working on a lot of this stuff for years and years and years, going back to the seventies. I have personally never seen anybody learn so much so fast and have such an impact as Governor Patton did in Kentucky. I've never seen anybody get up to speak so fast on things that he had not previously lived with and worked with and have an immediate impact. And along the way, he found the time to help Al Gore and me carry Kentucky in 1992 and 1996, against enormous odds, where we had absolutely no right to think we could win. And we sort of squeaked by both times. And he has done a magnificent job.

But let me just give you one example. Several years ago, when Secretary Riley, who also served with Jim and me as Governor back in the seventies, early eighties, was—we persuaded the Congress to adopt a bill saying that all the States ought to have academic standards. Then we persuaded Congress to say that States getting Federal money ought to at least have a system for identifying their failing schools.

Paul Patton said, "Well, if we're going to identify them, we might as well do something about them." And so when I was—and I have been trying to pass, with the support of Jim Hunt and Paul Patton, an accountability measure that Vice President Gore has advocated in his campaign that basically says that the recipient—it's real accountability. If Jim and Paul and I had time, if we had another 30 minutes, we could explain to you why the

proposal of the Democratic nominee for accountability will work better than the proposal of the Republican nominee for accountability, based on our combined half-century of experience in this.

Anyway, Patton says we ought to have—if we've got to identify these failing schools, we ought to do something about them. So he comes up with this system. I went to western Kentucky with Governor Patton a few months ago, to try to persuade the Congress to pass our bill, saying if you get this Federal aid, you must not only identify the failing schools, you have to turn them around within 2 years or shut them down and reopen them under new management.

Now, Jim has done something very like that in the most comprehensive way in North Carolina, and I'll come back to that. So I'm in this school in western Kentucky, in this low-income area, where over half the kids are on school lunch, where 4 years ago this was one of the worst schools in Kentucky. And they go through this system, and in 3 years, this is what happened: They went from 12 percent of the kids reading at or above grade level to about 60 percent; they went from 5 percent of the kids doing math at or above grade level to 70 percent; they went from zero kids in the whole school doing science at or above grade level to 63 percent—in 3 years.

And what does that show you? First of all, for those of us who have been doing this for 20 years, we know something now we didn't know in the late seventies, or we didn't know in '83 when the "Nation at Risk" report was issued. We actually know that you can identify failing schools and turn them around. And nobody, no State has done it any more systematically than he has. That school that was an abject failure is now one of the top 20 schools in the State of Kentucky.

Thank you Governor, for your leadership.

I want to start with something personal. When I was elected Governor in 1978, I got to serve with Jim Hunt, starting in '79. And he was a big deal, even then. [*Laughter*] And I was 32 and looked like I was about 25. You guys have taken care of that in the last 8 years. [*Laughter*] And you know when you come to the end of a certain period in your life, as I am coming to the end of my service

as President—and this is the first election in 26 years where I haven't been on a ballot somewhere, and most days I'm okay about it—but you can look back over your life and see a handful of people who did this, that, or the other thing for you, without whom you might never have become President.

And in 1979 Jim Hunt told the Democratic Governors they should make me the vice chairman of the Democratic Governors' Association, which, in turn, would entitle me to become chairman. And I was, by 9 years, I think, the youngest Governor in the country at the time. And nobody had—it would never have happened—the only reason it happened is because everybody thought he knew what he was talking about, and so they said okay. [Laughter]

And it was the first significant national position of any kind I had. And in 1980 I did become chairman of the Democratic Governors' Association and got involved in a whole range of things that I had never been involved with before and might never have come in contact with. So for good or ill, depending on what you think of the Clinton Presidency—[laughter]—I'm not sure I'd be here if it weren't for you.

And over more than 20 years now, Jim and Carolyn have been friends to Hillary and me. We always love being with them. We follow the progress of our families and the ups and downs and changes in our lives. And I have seen now that—he is the only Governor I know that served in the seventies, the eighties, the nineties, and the 21st century. [Laughter]

But as a result—he was kind of like me—if you really love being Governor, you don't get tired of doing it, because it's the best job in the world in so many ways. And there's nobody in my adult lifetime in the United States who has served as a Governor who has done more for education, children's health, or the long-term economic interests of a State than Jim Hunt. He has the most sweeping, deep, consistent record of public service over the longest period of time of any Governor in the United States in my lifetime. And the people of North Carolina should be very, very proud of that. It's an astonishing record.

Along the way, he's led your State through difficult times, like those awful floods, and made sure that we here in Washington did our part to help you recover. You have not really been in politics until you have been lobbied by Jim Hunt for something. [Laughter] And if you don't want to say yes, it's just like going to the dentist and having him yank your teeth out without any kind of deadening on your gums. [Laughter] It just never ends, and his capacity to guilt-trip you kind of goes up by the day. [Laughter] So eventually you say yes, and then after a while, you learn to say yes the first time you're asked because there's no point in going through this. [Laughter]

He really did a great job for you on that. I've watched him with these preschool programs and these early childhood health initiatives and the efforts he's made to turn around his schools that were underperforming. And along the way, he's done a lot of things nationally, but one thing in particular I want to thank him for, because he introduced me to the idea of the master teacher and National Board of Professional Teaching Certification, the idea that we ought to have, eventually, in every school building in America, somebody who has proved not only that he or she knows the subject that they're teaching completely, which is a big challenge today because we've got a teacher shortage, but is also supremely gifted in the classroom and good at teaching children.

So Jim worked for years and years and years on this National Board for Professional Teaching Certification, and a few years ago he came to the White House, and we kicked it off. And we certified, within a short time, the first 500 teachers. Now we have about 5,000. By the time I leave office, we'll have almost 10,000. And thanks to his leadership, we have as part of our education budget the capacity to go to 100,000 master teachers over the next 3 or 4 years. And now we've got this huge backlog. This is a big deal. The teachers, the men and women who get national board certification, have to prove they know their subjects well, that they are extremely skilled in the classroom, that they understand how to relate to children and families.

And this is a huge professional distinction if they get it. We see that every time there's one of these master teachers, just in one school building, he or she can change the whole culture of education in the building and infect everybody else with a certain enthusiasm and sense of possibility and learning. This is something that's impossible to make a headline out of. It's impossible to make it an issue in the Presidential election. You know, it sounds like something little. It's something huge. You've all seen that new book that's out called "The Tipping Point." That's what these master teachers are. They're not only good in their classroom; they provide the tipping point of influence in school after school after school.

So long after Jim Hunt is gone from the North Carolina Governor's Mansion, this passion that he nurtured for years, when no one else was paying attention, to train, identify, certify master teachers and then get one in every school building in the country, will be revolutionizing education and improving the futures of children not just in his native State but throughout the United States.

There's nobody like you. And I love you, and I thank you for everything you've done. Thank you.

Let me just say one other thing. What's all that got to do with this election? Let me just make a couple of points here. I believe, and it's already been said, that education is sort of at the center of this Presidential election, and that's good. And then there are people that view that cynically, because they say, "Well, Presidents can get up and talk about education, but after all, what can they do? It's only 7 percent of the total money we spend on our public schools." Well, let me just say, when I got elected, it was under 6 percent and headed down. So at least we got it back to 7.

But it seems to me that we ought to say that education is a constitutional responsibility of the State, the operational responsibility of the local schools and the districts, but it still is a national priority. And what I have always believed is that we had a special obligation, number one, just to invest more, because we've got the biggest and most diverse group of schoolkids in our Nation's history and because even though the school

populations are bigger in many, many States, a smaller percentage of the property owners who pay property taxes have kids in schools. I know that seems counterintuitive, but that's happening in State after State.

So the States need more resources, number one. And number two, there is now, as I said a moment ago about the failing schools, we now know something we didn't know in 1983, when the Governors were responding to the national report called "A Nation At Risk." We know things we didn't even know in 1989, when the Governors met with President Bush and articulated these national education goals for the next decade, to try to be reached by the year 2000, about how to do this.

And our philosophy has been that we should not tell the States how to do what they do, but we should fund those things that the research and the educators tell us work. For example, one of the things—I wish you had heard this in some of the discussions we've heard in this election, but one of the things that I'm quite proud of is that under Dick Riley, who was Governor of South Carolina, as I said, with Jim and me in the seventies and the eighties, the burden of regulations the Federal Government imposes on the States and the school districts has actually been reduced by about two-thirds below what it was in the previous administration. We have nearly doubled funding for education and training, even as we have gone from a \$290 billion deficit to a \$230 billion surplus and shrunk the size of Government to its lowest point in 40 years.

But we've tried to focus this money on what works. For example, when I became President, we were giving no support to the States for after-school programs and summer school and night programs, to turn the schools into community learning centers, nothing, even though we knew that we had all these latchkey kids and that they needed some place to go.

Well, now, we're serving 800,000 of them, and we want to go to 1.6 million of them in this budget. And it's the best money we could spend. And a lot of these schools have absolutely no capacity to afford things like this unless we do it. We started in '94. Only 14 percent of our schools and 3 percent of

our classrooms were connected to the Internet. Because of the leadership of the Vice President and getting the E-rate, which allows even the poorest schools in North Carolina a 90 percent discount so they can hook on, we have gone from 14 percent of our schools to 95 percent of our schools connected to the Internet; from 3 percent of our classrooms to 65 percent of our classrooms connected to the Internet. So we're moving this thing a long way.

And our basic philosophy is, then, that we should not micromanage what the schools do but that we should target the funds, since it's only 7 percent, to the areas that the educators and the research says will have the biggest impact.

Now that's the real fundamental debate in this election. And if you listen to—both sides say they're for accountability, and they are. And as I've said, I think our accountability proposal that our candidate for President, Vice President Gore, and the others have embraced is better. And I believe Jim and Paul agree with me, but we don't have to argue that out. The point is, that's the good news. The good news is that the American people believe that there should be higher standards and accountability.

But we believe it ought to be accountability-plus—plus funds for 100,000 new teachers for smaller classes in the early grades; plus a tax credit to help to cut the costs of raising bond issues to build or modernize schools; plus funds to help repair 5,000 schools a year. We've got \$100 billion school construction and repair deficit in America today. I bet you there is—no telling how many schools in North Carolina and Kentucky, where the kids are going to schools in housetrailer or where big closets have been converted to classrooms or where old buildings are so old they can't—I've been in schools that are so decrepit they can't even be wired for the Internet.

So we have standards and accountability, plus the tools to do the job. And I think that is consistent with the stunning record of Jim Hunt. If you look at what he's done, he's gone out there and given local communities the tools they need to give children early childhood education, access to health care, and strategies to turn around schools that

aren't performing. It works, and we ought to do more of it.

The only other thing I would say that's highly relevant to this is, you can't get blood out of a turnip. If you're going to spend money, you've got to have the money to spend. And that's the other big issue in this election. I don't want to get into a political debate about the structure of tax programs or even how the Social Security should be reformed. I have my own ideas, but someone else will have to make that decision. But I just want to make a basic point here that I think is fundamental to this.

People ask me all the time, "We have such a great economy, and you and Bob Rubin and Lloyd Bentsen and Gene Sperling, you've got all these wizards coming in. What great new idea did you bring to economic policy?" And I always give a one-word answer, "Arithmetic." I brought arithmetic to Washington. That's the great thing I got out of living way out there in the hinterlands. I still thought 2 and 2 was supposed to add up to 4. And a rosy scenario was not any good until the money came in. That old Cuba Gooding line "Show me the money" is still a pretty good line when you're making—*[laughter]*.

So what does that all have to do with this election and education? If you want States to be able to progress in education, they have to have the funds to do it, which means you have to have continued prosperity, because when people are prosperous, they send tax money to the State. And if you want the Federal Government to do it, you have to continue the prosperity. And the most important thing we can do, I believe, is to continue a formula that says, find new markets for American products and services; keep investing in America's productive capacity, education, and technology and science; and keep paying down the debt down and make America debt free.

Why? Because it keeps interest rates lower. In a global economy, where a trillion dollars crosses national borders every day, the interest rates people pay for homes and college loans and car payments in North Carolina are affected by whether or not this Nation is a fiscally responsible Nation.

So whatever you think about the details of these competing tax cuts or Social Security plans, here is the bottom line: You cannot have a \$1½ trillion tax cut, a \$1 trillion Social Security privatization program, and several hundred billion dollars worth of promises unless you go back into deficits. The big argument for our side, for Vice President Gore and Senator Lieberman, is, we say, "Look, we're going to have a smaller tax cut. We think it's better because we try to target it to education and long-term care and child care and retirement savings, but it can't be much bigger than this because we've got to invest in education and health care and the environment and defense, and we've got to keep paying off the debt."

Now, that's the big issue. It's not—I promise you, it's more important—the arithmetic issue is more important than the details of who's got the better Social Security plan or the details of who's got the better tax plan, even though I think our side does, and I'd be happy to debate it—the arithmetic issue, the big thing here.

The other thing you need to remember is—and we've shown it for 8 years—you can say, "Well, I'm going to spend this much money over the next 10 years." But if the money doesn't come in, you don't have to spend it. But if you give it all away in a tax cut on the front end or the privatization program, on the front end, it's gone. And you're certainly not going to go get it back when the economy turns down.

So you're going to have a big Governor's race in North Carolina. The ability of the next Governor—and you know who we all hope it will be and believe it will be—but his ability to follow in Jim Hunt's footsteps will rest in no small measure on the success of the North Carolina economy, in generating jobs, generating opportunity, in generating revenues to turn around and put in education.

So that's my pitch to you. I think accountability-plus is better than accountability-minus in education. And I think arithmetic still works in economics. And I know if we just keep interest rates one percent lower a year over the next decade, which is what I believe the difference will be in paying off the debt and going back to deficit so you

can't pay off the debt—let me just tell you what that is. That's \$390 billion in lower home mortgages, \$30 billion in lower car payments, \$15 billion in lower college loan payments, plus lower credit card payments, plus lower business loan costs, which means more new businesses, more employees, higher profits, and a bigger stock market. It's a tax cut for everybody. Getting this country out of debt is a tax cut for everybody.

So that's what—when you go back home in North Carolina and people talk to you about, the next 2 weeks, about how this fits into the decision you have to make in North Carolina, talk to them about arithmetic and economics and talk to them about accountability-plus and tell them that Jim Hunt deserves a worthy successor.

Thank you, and God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:25 p.m. in the Monticello Room at the Jefferson Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to former Treasury Secretaries Lloyd Bentsen and Robert E. Rubin; Governor Hunt's wife, Carolyn; Republican Presidential candidate Gov. George W. Bush; and actor Cuba Gooding, Jr.

### **Remarks on the Legislative Agenda for School Construction and Education**

*October 24, 2000*

Well, first, let me thank Glenda Parsons. I thought that she was eloquent, insistent, comprehensive, and enlightening for anybody that hasn't heard about this issue and why it matters. And let me thank Secretary Riley for pointing out that the Federal Government helps States and localities build roads and highways and prisons, and schools are the most important network to the 21st century of all.

Let me thank you, sir, in a larger sense, for nearly 8 years of service now, during which you have reduced the paperwork burden on local school districts and States but mightily increased the level of assistance we are giving them to do the things that work. That's one reason—along with the outstanding work being done at the State level by people like Governor Patton from Kentucky, who is here with us today, and local